

UN Luncheon on Financing Climate Adaptation

Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava

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Good afternoon, everyone.

I want to start by recognizing some of the many influential voices in the room here today: the President of the General Assembly, our hosts, UN Habitat and Oceanix, and the ministers, ambassadors, and many other distinguished guests in attendance – including many mayors like myself.

I am Daniella Levine Cava, Mayor of Miami-Dade County, Florida – a growing, vibrant, and diverse community of almost 3 million residents and almost a quarter of a million businesses that welcomes more than 20 million visitors annually to our beautiful beaches, thriving economy, and cultural offerings – and I am so appreciative of the opportunity to address you all. I want to use my platform today to address issues common to communities in the Indian Ocean, throughout the Caribbean and the coasts of the Americas, across the Southern Pacific islands, and in all coastal communities around the world.

Recent scientific reports released by the United Nations have made it abundantly clear that we must transform our “business as usual” attitude in order to protect life on our planet. Our seas are rising, and extreme weather events are becoming the new normal. Already, the cost of inaction is too great, and it is only growing. Last year, extreme weather cost economies and governments around the world hundreds of billions of dollars – a cost expected to grow drastically. And this accounting does not include any of the other socio-economic effects of climate change, which range from ecosystem degradation, disruption of our global food and water supplies, to increases in vector-borne diseases, and mass displacement following floods, wildfires, – and

something Miami-Dade is particularly attuned to – hurricanes and cyclones.

It is clear, then, that climate change is here, and no where do we feel it more presently than in our coastal, island, and low-lying communities around the globe. Back home in South Florida, we have already seen 25 centimeters of sea level rise over the last century, an issue especially visible during king tides or heavy rain fall events. But unlike other types of flooding, long-term sea level rise will not recede. My community expects to see between 53 and 137 centimeters of sea level rise in the next fifty years.

No longer can we afford to focus ONLY on mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions – the time to FULLY prevent human-driven catastrophic climate damage is behind us. And, while we must continue to reduce our carbon footprint, we need to take immediate action to adapt and live within our new reality.

Humanity has never experienced this before. Never in recorded history have we had the world around us change so quickly and so adversely. We cannot look to the past for ways to adapt. The problems we face today require new ways of thinking.

Fortunately, scientists, entrepreneurs, and leaders like those at the table today have a wealth of knowledge that we can tap to benefit our communities. Bold action to address and live with these challenges can inspire others and rally our residents behind us.

Though we represent diverse jurisdictions, we all must invest in protecting our ONE world. There is no Planet B. This means pursuing comprehensive approaches and building consensus around our shared stake in OUR climate and OUR future. If sea level rise does not recognize borders and if heat waves do not stop at national boundaries, then OUR solutions cannot be limited to OUR national shorelines. Our conversations today and in every discussion like this one must be driven by a core belief that

solutions must be equitable – providing equal access to opportunities and assistance.

Coastal cities and Small Island Developing States are on the frontlines of this climate reality. Just like in my region, billions around the world are exposed to the dangerous effects of climate change without the resources that the richer nations can bring to bear. In this increasingly urbanized world, much of the recent population growth is occurring near the coastline, moving people closer to the water while land shortages are driving the price of housing up and squeezing the poorest families out. We will need to learn to live with the water, but we will need to do so without burdening some and forcing even more out of their homes.

When we plan, we first must acknowledge the influence that historic and current structural inequalities have had on our communities. We must design more just institutions and hold them accountable. If we ignore our past, we will continue to carry it with us – whether it is in the legacy of greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere or in the shackles of inequality that entrap communities on the margins and limit their paths forward.

The question then becomes how we move forward equitably, sustainably, and cooperatively. We can only do this, together.

Our experience in Miami-Dade with hurricanes has taught us a lot about working across jurisdictional boundaries to quickly recover and bounce back from these events. By codifying collaboration into our governance, we can create systems that address the many issues we face in concert, delivering the greatest returns on our investments.

We can design adaptation plans that do not displace our low-income populations and instead empower these same populations to grow and ascend, economically. We can build transportation networks that increase access and safety while relying on renewable and sustainable infrastructure. In short, we

can make sure every two steps forward do not take us one step back. Because, again, we do not have time to waste.

And no one knows how to work within efficient systems like local leaders. That's why we are coming together and getting it done from the ground up. Last Earth Day, I proudly announced Miami-Dade County's commitment to the International Race to Zero, along with over 4,500 other governments, businesses, investors, and academic institutions. We are not waiting; we are acting because governments must act at the speed of innovation.

Our environment is our economy – it attracts visitors and puts food on the table for families from the everglades to the bay. But this also means we are the canary in the coal mine of climate change.

For our county and our residents, climate change already impacts our daily lives. Because we are already at sea level, we must prepare for coastal property damage from storms and flooding coupled with insurance companies leaving the area as risks grow. Because our water supply comes from our underground aquifer, we must address saltwater intrusion and find solutions for the impending loss of our freshwater source. And because of the intersectional challenge of poverty, we are exposed to greater health risks. Our children, the elderly, and other vulnerable residents suffer more sickness when pollution leads to an increase in asthma and heart disease. Our poorer and less protected residents suffer heat stroke if left without the protection of air conditioning. Moreover, many private insurance companies are pulling out of our community, leaving residents to assume climate risk on their own.

The time for theories and debate has passed. We cannot just talk about this crisis. We must act urgently but must do so in a just and principled way.

As part of Miami-Dade's landmark Climate Action Strategy, we committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. We are building mobility systems to reduce carbon fuel consumption. We are expanding green and blue spaces, and planting trees to populate our urban tree canopy. We are reducing our waste and water use, and repurposing waste to fuel our cities.

Our Climate Action Strategy will even help provide a template for others through our partnership with the ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, who joined me to unveil our plan at the COP26 last November. It is this sort of multilateral and unbound collaboration, which earned recognition by the IPCC in their recently released Working Group Three update. That report specifically highlighted our Sea Level Rise Strategy as an example of a forward-looking, whole-of-government approach.

We are also collaborating through the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, which brings together over 100 local governments, 6 million people, 15 million visitors, and many non-governmental and private partners. Together, we work on a consensus sea level rise projection every 5 years and a Regional Climate Action Plan that helps businesses, governments, and residents stay informed.

We are a founding member of the International Extreme Heat Alliance and I appointed the world's first Chief Heat Officer, an action now replicated in cities around the globe.

We're not just pursuing explicit climate policy; we are also integrating it into every aspect of our path forward. Our transportation plan is another example of how we include sustainability and resiliency in every aspect of local governance. This plan encourages higher-density development along transit corridors and includes electrification of our fleet. Even our county procurement has been revamped to favor businesses that are acting on climate.

Throughout my administration, we are accelerating adaptation, integrating sea level rise into design guidelines, embedding climate principles into our growth master plans, and collaborating with others to learn together and share best practices.

We are only able to take these and other measures in Miami-Dade because of our strong financial position and resources – thinking and acting globally, we must invest in small island nations, coastal communities, and those countries most at risk. As I said before, the challenges we face from climate change know no border, and neither should our solutions.

This new reality can be overwhelming, but we cannot let the challenge paralyze us. Climate change is here. It is affecting us today and we have a duty to act. This is a moral duty and also an economic opportunity. A cost-benefit analysis of measures to adapt provide us with rays of hope for prosperity as we begin to reverse the damage done. In Southeast Florida alone, every dollar invested in climate and disaster mitigation today will save us \$4 in disaster recovery later. Market solutions are bearing fruit and we will continue to invest in promising technological innovations.

The larger transition to a less-carbon intensive world will not happen overnight, and unless we provide more equitable funding to developing and coastal areas, it will not happen for some, at all. When we fail to protect others, one way or another, we will all pay.

I pledge to do my part, to inspire my constituents to do theirs, and I beg you to take the pledge as well. The path we are embarking upon not only reduces our greenhouse gas emissions, but also helps guarantee that our communities have clean air to breathe, fresh water to drink, and a thriving ecosystem in which to live, work, and play. This “all-in” strategy will ensure that NO community is left behind as we work to solve these challenges

and develop a new blue-green economy that builds sustainably and resiliently far into the future.